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CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FOR THE HOUSEHOLD.

A GROTTTO.

WHAT memories and what hopes cluster around the fireside on this festive day! Gay groups of children, merry as only they can be, *riant*; joyous youths and maidens, quiet middle-aged wives and husbands, with brows relaxed from care and smiling in sympathy with their juniors; old age, looking down the ranks of younger generations, as those who have gained serene heights of wisdom—all these are gathered in the ideal home at the Christmas festival!

"What shall be our Christmas decorations cousin Elsie," exclaimed the foremost of a group of girls who burst into my sanctuary just as the above paragraph was finished. "We rely on you to think of something real fresh and jolly."

"Jolly?" I asked with a lifting of the eye-brow. "Yes, jolly," stoutly persisted Elfreda. "I've looked out the word and it's all right. It is derived from *jolie*, the French for pretty, or *geola* the Saxon for feast, the yule or the feast of the nativity, my dictionary says. So jolly is just the word for yule-tide."

"Now we cannot have anything very expensive or that takes too much time to make, but we want something different from the hackneyed Christmas tree."

Thus adjured, cousin Elsie made out a list of amusements and decorations which may be adjusted to the varying wants of other households.

"We will take a lot of thin siding, piled up in the back-yard, or any old stuff that is strong enough, and have Jed (the oldest boy-cousin), saw off enough to make several frames, about four feet high and six feet long. On these he will nail, with our help—or hindrance—diagonal strips of thin boarding or old clapboards, about six inches apart from each other, each frame making a length of rough, light fencing. These strips will extend above and below the frame far enough to make the fence six feet in height."

"What next, cousin Elsie?"

"Along these diagonal boards we will tack strips of dark green cambric, doubled, so as to be strong and firm. They must be an inch wide and must be nailed not more than six inches apart. Do not be discouraged by the work; these frames will last many years, when finished. Tied together, top and bottom, and braced at the back or secured by slats fastened from the tops to the tops of doors and windows, and this fence may serve many purposes."

"Now the sport begins, cousin Elsie," said Elfreda.

"Exactly. While we are tacking on the cambric, Jed will bring in a load of fir and spruce. He can get small trees that have been discarded from those gathered for Christmas, through injury or breakage. These will do perfectly well for our use. We will break them into lengths varying from six inches to two feet, and stick the stems behind the cambric strips far enough to hold them firmly in place. We shall begin at the top with the shorter branches, and work down with the larger, each layer irregularly overlapping the one above, disposing them so as to lie neither too rough nor too even. These portable lengths may be used as a bastion, fence, play-house, green-room, or screens, just as we wish, during the rest of the winter. It will be a long time before the needles are dry enough to rattle off, and even then they can be easily renewed with fresh greenery."

"And how delicious the odor, as well as delightful to look at!" exclaimed Bell. "Pillows made of fir needles are all the rage now, with the covers worked in all sorts of quaint designs. We can have the breath of the evergreen all day long. But you haven't told us what we can do with it on Christmas Day."

"Wait," said Elsie, mysteriously, "I have too many plans to unfold all at once."

The day arrived, the one day of all the year, when families long separated are re-united.

Our novel fence sections were made rapidly and easily. When decorated, they were an immense success. We arranged two lengths on either side of a grotto, flaring out to make an illusive perspective. The temple itself was surmounted by a dome made out of an old umbrella. The ribs had been lengthened by flexible saplings, the cloth coarsely pieced down to reach their ends, and the edge covered with garlands of princess pine and cords covered with small bits of evergreen. On the concave surface we sewed small pieces of cedar, interspersed with bright autumn leaves. To the exterior of this dome were attached by a stitch here and there, masses of fluffy white cotton that looked

like snow, on which sparkled silver-scales of mica that had been sprinkled with mucilage. The supports of the dome were saplings of white birch; the wall behind the grotto was hung with gray fur, a robe of fox skin, and another large skin was spread before the temple, with its flaring avenue of spicy greenery. If the garland of pink paper roses that festooned the top of the green wall was an anachronism, it made a pretty effect and was not criticised.

This extemporized grotto and its approach, occupied the whole of the end of the parlor, and was set up in a few minutes after the Christmas dinner, having been all ready to be put together. When in place, a large gypsy kettle was hung under the center of the dome. It was simply a bushel-basket, covered with black cambric, the cloth coming up six inches above the edge of the basket, not only to conceal the interior, but to give it a greater depth. The cloth was gored a little to draw it in at the top, kettle-shaped, and held in place by a wire run in a hem at the top, and four others holding it straight up from the basket.

This kettle, as may be surmised, contained the Christmas presents for the family. When all came trooping into the parlor, there stood the temple with its wintry covering and its avenue of rose-hung greenery, and underneath the dome the gypsy kettle, hung on three poles of silvery birch, shimmering over a flame of orange and red tin-foil. But who crooned over the lurid fire, warming her hands at the blaze?—not the traditional Santa Claus, but a veritable Christmas Witch. She resembled the old woman who showed "Guy's punch-bowl" during so many years at the entrance of Warwick Castle—a wizened beldame, with peaked nose and chin and receding mouth. It was only Elfreda, wearing a mask and her fair locks covered with a full-bordered cap, but her short-waisted dress, with its crossed white kerchief, and full-gathered skirt of large flowered cambric, made her, for the time, a genuine Romany Queen.

There were small lamps arranged as footlights, but the rest of the room was darkened. The light quivering on the snow and the flame under the kettle, made the illusion perfect. The old beldame's bent form and quivering voice as she took out the Christmas gifts as plums boiling in her cauldron, and called off the names of the recipients, were not less well adapted to the scene.

"Coffee, for the head of the family," piped out the Gypsy, after all was ready, and her gift was greeted by a chorus of laughter, for Papa's penchant for coffee was well known. He liked coffee as Dr. Johnson liked tea, and, like him, took it morning, noon and night. The witch held up to the light a real coffee-pot, neatly covered with birch-bark, spout and all sewed and gummed and tied by the delicate fingers of Elfreda herself. On one side of it the young witch had neatly traced a pen and ink picture of herself as the old witch bending over the cauldron in the Christmas grotto. It was a pretty scene, done with a good deal of artistic feeling. The novel coffee-pot was filled with coffee-flavored bon-bons.

"A hood for Mamma," continued the gypsy, forgetting her assumed character, as she drew forth a snowy head-covering, glistening with scales of snow, also fashioned by the same delicate fingers which could not be made to look coarse, although they were artificially stained for the occasion. It was done in ordinary crochet shell-stitch, and run in a zig-zag manner, after being finished, with silver tinsel cord, such as is used in couching. It was a bright, warm and becoming gift.

And then followed a large flat box, made of wood and covered, also, with birch-bark, for Isabel. On the cover was painted, in a free, sketchy style, the yellow violet, roots and all. This box contained a herbarium, for Isabel was an enthusiastic botanist.

In like manner every member of the family and the guests present received something indicative of the taste or habits of each. Thus, Jed had a good-sized canoe of birch-bark, with oars of miniature lawn-tennis bats, in recognition of his athletic tastes.

And I, Elsie, had a pad of neatly-trimmed birch-bark paper, one corner of the outside leaf holding a clever sketch of your humble servant seated at her writing-desk. This, too, was done in pen and ink.

Space fails me to tell of all the Witch's cauldron contained. One word about the fence of living green, which served many purposes during the remainder of the winter. On festive occasions the limbs were hung with flowers, or with fancy toys and bon-bons and tinsel. They alternated with blossoming roses and mimic snow, they were successively used as screens, as a green-room and side-scenes for a parlor play, as a Boffin's Bower and a Paradise Garden when the little street waifs were gathered in for their annual festival. Then these strange trees bore more curious fruitage than ever

the tropics saw. From them depended the golden globe of the orange and the red and yellow banana, to say nothing of streaked apples and huge pineapples, balloons of amber and crimson soared from the top, glittering stars sparkled among the dense green, amidst everything that could fire a boy's heart or soothe a girl's fancy.

Finally, two lengths were used to fence in the side of a sunny bay-window in the sitting-room, where we constructed a miniature winter garden. A shallow trough of zinc stood on a green wooden support in front of the center window, at the height of the bottom of the sash; and here, filled with rich earth, and covered with moss and ferns, grew the chiekerberry and wintergreen, the dew-berry and the princess pine.

A broken piece of a mirror in the center served to simulate a lake, and the canary in his cage above knew no better, if we did. One length of the green wall stood across the end of the hall, opposite the front door, and was a joy until the spring-time. To the middle of it was attached a panel of hollyhocks, extremely decorative, but too large to look well, save at a distance. The flowers seemed to have grown directly up out of the fir, and we never half enjoyed them before. Another section, with some dark cambric tacked on the back, we used in a screen in Belle's chamber, to keep out the draughts from a large north window. Sometimes she threw diagonally over the top a length of old, soft, dark orange silk—faded and home-dyed finery—and the whole room was lighted up with a sort of golden splendor.

HESTER M. POOLE.

INTERIOR AND CEILING DECORATION.

DESIGNS FROM THE ALHAMBRA.

(See colored plate opposite.)

THE Palace of the Alhambra, at Granada, Spain, is a rich treasure-house of decorative art, as well as a monument of surpassing historical interest. It marks the highest reach of that wave of Arab invasion, which at one time threatened to overflow Europe, and bring the civilized world under the standard of Mohammed. The Arabs, or Moors, as they were generally called in Europe, invaded Spain A. D. 711, and were not driven from Granada, their last stronghold in that country, until 1492. The building of the Alhambra (splendid memorial of their sojourn in the west), was begun by the monarch Ibnu-l-Ahmar, or Alhamar, as the name is sometimes written, in 1248, and was completed under his successors about 1314. It is beyond comparison the grandest existing example of Arabic art, and, even after more than five centuries of vandalism and neglect, remains an unique mine of that exquisite style of ornamentation known as "Arabesque."

Appreciating the growing taste for Oriental ideas in decoration, and feeling that the peculiar art of the Alhambra ornament could easily be adapted to modern uses, fac-simile copies of the patterns employed in the decoration of this beautiful palace have been made in wall-papers by M. H. Birge & Sons. While the drawings have necessarily been reduced in scale, there have been preserved in color and style the original beauty and grace of line for which they are remarkable. The collection from this source consists of twenty-one patterns of papers and borders, a few of which are shown in the design on opposite page as suggestive of their combination and arrangement. The variety of effect producible with these materials will be found on examination very remarkable. It includes on the one hand designs available in decoration of the most striking and sumptuous character, while others lend themselves, with equal ease, to the simplest and quietest taste in domestic interiors. In all alike will be perceived a distinctive meaning and character only to be met in works of genuine art. They contain hardly a common-place tint or line. "A fit dwelling for the immortal gods!" was the exclamation of Peter Martyr, as he entered the Alhambra in the train of its Gothic conquerors. On one of the interior walls an Arab poet had composed this inscription: "Look attentively at my elegance, and thou wilt reap the benefit of a commentary on decoration." The Moorish artist was indeed, in a sense, shut up by religious restrictions to the decorative in art, a fact which at least partly explains the excellence of his work in the Alhambra palace.

SO-CALLED visiting cards are now made of a double leaf of thick paper, with roughened or curved edges, with hand-painted scene on its face, and corner adorned with a silk cord bow. The name is written on these. They serve also to convey congratulatory messages.